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STEP BY STEP





STEP BY STEP

A STORY OF THE EARLY DAYS

OF

MOSES MENDELSSOHN

BY

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PHILADELPHIA

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PREFACE

The heroes and heroines of Jewish history are as many as those in the records of any other people, but, unhappily, their lives and deeds are less known. Apart from characters in Holy Writ and a few worthies in rabbinical literature, little has been done to rescue them from forgetfulness.

In the present volume an attempt is made to revive interest in the early days and struggles of Moses Mendelssohn, one of the most illustrious Israelites of modern times—in some respects the most gifted and helpful. Under the guise of fiction, the chief scenes and persons of his childhood and youth are introduced, and his life and experiences in Dessau and Berlin are faithfully portrayed, though here and there a little liberty has been taken with the characters.

PREFACE

Written particularly for young people that have reached the threshold of maturer years, it is yet by no means a book for boys and girls only, but, it is hoped, it will interest children of a larger growth, and be found helpful for our Sabbath Schools, our Jewish Women's Council classes, the Jewish Chautauqua, and other literary circles.

The age in which Mendelssohn lived was a formative one, and the story does not exaggerate in associating with his name, even in youth, those wise and broad tendencies that were, on the whole, to uplift his and succeeding generations. If his thoughts appear too mature for one so young, it must not be forgotten that he had a gifted intellect, and showed early the promise of his later years.

A. S. I.

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STEP BY STEP

I

FATHER AND SON

“ Moses! Moses, my son!”

A slenderly built boy, of about ten years of age, with dark eyes, which seemed particularly large, so full and earnest was their glance, ran quickly, at his father’s call, with a slip of paper in his hand, from his low wooden bench in the garden, and stood at the rear door, fronting the bit of ground with a few straggling flowers and climbing plants.

“ What is it, father? Do you wish me for anything? ”

He thought that there was some errand to be attended to for his father, some little service to be done. He was always ready

for such a task, although it took him for a while from his precious books and writing.

The father bent down and kissed him.

“Now, my son, you know the doctor told you not to write and study so much. Here, for two hours, you have been hard at work, stooping over your bench, and curled up like a monkey. You must be more careful—how often have I told you that! Do you wish to become a humpback? ”

“Well, father,” the boy replied, a roguish smile lighting up his features, “I would rather be a humpback in body than in mind. See what I have done! I am sure I can help you soon, can I not? O how glad I should be, if only I could help you! ”

The man glanced at the slip of paper his son was extending so eagerly. It was a short Hebrew letter of his own composition. The words could not have been

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written more regularly and clearly. The boy blushed with pleasure as his father again kissed him tenderly.

“ Well done, my child. Why, you will soon be able to help me at my work, and then we shall get rich, so rich ! ”

“ And then I can buy some books, and go to Berlin to study and become a rabbi. Not so, father ? ” And he looked fondly at his parent.

“ But you will never be able to help if you don’t grow stronger and stouter. You know that very well. Here, take this little book that I have just copied for Rabbi Hirsch to the school-house, and then walk out a bit and play until Maariv.” *

He handed the book to his son, who, after a warm embrace, ran rapidly down the narrow lane that led to the house of learning.

In the quiet little town of Dessau, which,

* The evening prayer.

in the early decades of the eighteenth century, the days before the railway, seemed distant from Berlin and Leipsic, there lived about one hundred and fifty Jewish families. The community was small and of comparatively recent growth. A few of the Jewish residents were in marked favor at court, which the Duke maintained with as much dignity as if he ruled a mighty kingdom instead of a petty duchy. The great majority of the Jews, however, felt the full force of the harsh, repressive laws, which compelled them to live in a special part of the place, and limited them to a few occupations, and those of the humbler kind. Yet, despite the general poverty that prevailed, and the painful uncertainty whether the government might not oppress them still further, Dessau became a centre of learning, and produced some eminent Jewish scholars, who were later to take a leading part in the struggle to remove unjust

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laws from the statute-book, and bring about civil and religious liberty. That day of emancipation was still far distant. It is well to understand that poverty and oppression have never wholly crushed the Israelite; they have always impelled him to greater effort, and made him love his religion and his literature all the more. In the olden times, when the plague of darkness fell on Egypt, in the district where our people lived there was abundant light. So in every period of persecution there was light in darkness, as the Jew turned with greater love to the study of his law.

Poorest of the poor at that time was Mendel, the father of Moses. His earnings were of the scantiest. He copied Hebrew books for the printer, he wrote marriage contracts and other documents, and even scrolls of the Law, the Pentateuch. Now, to be a Sofer, a scribe, was regarded as a high honor, for it demanded a good

character as well as learning and ability. But it was a poorly paid occupation, and Mendel had to devote much of his time to teaching children, in order to keep his family from starvation. He was greatly esteemed in the town, and his beautiful Hebrew handwriting was known far and wide, often bringing him work from other communities, and adding to his limited means.

The little two-story house still standing in Ascan Street, where Moses was born on September 6, 1729, was a home of poverty, it is true, but the inmates were so bound together in affection that they forgot all hardship and the sanded floor. Mendel and his wife Sarah were loving parents, and Moses grew up in an atmosphere of unaffected piety and love of learning. As a plant grows faster and sturdier in favorable soil, where the sunshine has free access, so the child developed rapidly. His love of

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study was remarkable, and from the earliest years he made surprising progress. Nothing could keep him from his books. His parents were naturally proud of him, but they feared that he was overtaxing his mind, and took every means of checking his ardor. More than once he had a severe spell of illness, which forced him to stop reading, and yet, the moment he recovered, he would turn to his lessons again. The doctor's caution, to be more careful of his health, was heeded only for a while. He was a lad hard to be kept from his books, particularly because he was not fond of boyish sports, for his size and lack of muscle made him dislike all feats of strength.

Mendel, amid his exacting duties, which left but little time for leisure, did not fail to teach his son each day, and he allowed nothing to interfere with the task. It was, indeed, only in the spirit of the Mosaic law, which bids parents "teach them dili-

gently to thy children," that he strove to make the boy familiar with the language and meaning of Holy Writ. Moses on his part responded eagerly to his father's efforts, and, within a year or two, he was master of the Chumesh, or the Five Books of the Law, could write Hebrew letters with ease and accuracy, and was beginning the study of Rashi,* long before his tenth year. Mendel soon felt that the boy required a teacher better equipped than himself, and would be ready in a year, perhaps earlier, for the rabbinical school, where he might begin his studies in earnest, no doubt for the rabbinate of a great city like Berlin. The best was not too good for Moses.

"Sarah," said Mendel to his wife, re-entering the room, after giving Moses the book to be taken to the school-house,

* Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, a famous commentator of the early Middle Ages (1040-1105).

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“Sarah, I think, with God’s help, we’ll make something out of that boy. Don’t you think so, mother?”

“I should have more hope, Mendel, dear, if he were a little stronger. Why, last night he coughed for a long time, and look how his shoulders are curving. He will become a humpback, and what then?” And the tears sprang to her eyes.

“Don’t worry, my dear wife. Don’t worry. Moses will never have a humpback brain. He told me so a few minutes ago.” And both smiled at their son’s clever remark.

“If we only were richer, for his sake,” said Sarah.

“Never mind, my dearest, never mind. Don’t you remember that old story about Mazzel and Berochoh? One must not expect to have both these fairies, although sometimes they go close together. If the dear God has not seen fit to send us Maz-

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zel,* He has surely given us Berochoh † in our boy Moses. Is it not so, Sarah? So don't let us grieve because we are not so rich as the Duke. With all his wealth, he has no treasure like our Moses.”

* Wealth, or good fortune; the word literally denotes a constellation.

† Blessing.

II

BY THE STREAM

The Beth Hammidrash, or school of learning, which had been founded decades before by the Wulff family, early and prominent settlers in Dessau, was a modest building, which had always aroused the interest of Moses. He knew he was to study there one day to become a leader in Israel, like so many others that had entered its doors. Within its walls he would be able to gratify his thirst for knowledge and learn all about his religion, its history, its famous men and books. He had often peeped through the narrow windows, in boyish fashion, and caught a glimpse of the low, whitewashed walls, the long benches, the plain desks on which the Talmud folios used to rest, with the students in busy debate, as their voices, half shouting, half crooning, were borne to his curious ears.

Yes, he, too, would join the classes at no distant time. He, too, would be one of the eager pupils, with his Talmud wide open before him, and take part in the exciting discussions. Perhaps in a month—perhaps in a year, if he were found equal to the work, and had sufficient preparation! So with the ease and confidence of an old pupil, he stood at the heavy oaken door, and in response to the cry “Come in!” faced Rabbi Hirsch, the head teacher.

“My father asked me to bring you this book, Rabbi.”

“Ah, you are the son of Mendel? How old are you?”

“Just ten, Rabbi.”

“And have you studied Torah?”

“Since I was five my father taught me Chumesh, Dikduk,* and Mishnah,† and I

* Grammar.

† Work compiled by Rabbi Judah the Holy, about 220 of the common era.

BY THE STREAM

can write a beautiful Hebrew letter, too," and the boy's usually pale face flushed with natural pride.

"Come, my lad," said the rabbi, very much interested, "I have a little leisure. Read a few verses from the week's section of the Law, with Rashi. Here is the Chumesh."

Moses took the book unconcernedly, opened it at the proper place—it was the section Balak—and began to read and translate freely. Then, turning to the commentary of Rashi, he went on as fluently with his clear and simple explanation. He would have gone further, had not the rabbi checked him.

"Enough, enough! I am more than satisfied. You can tell your father to bring you to me. You have been well prepared, and are able to enter the higher class." And the rabbi beckoned to Moses to leave.

"Rabbi," said the boy, "I wish you

would first let me explain something in the Sidra * to you.”

“ Well, go on, Moses,” he replied, much amused at the lad’s eagerness to display his knowledge.

“ It says, ‘ There shall be no enchantments in Israel.’ An enchantment”—and the boy let his voice rise and fall as he had heard the students do in the school—“ an enchantment is to deceive, like the man who came to Dessau last month, and made the canary bird pretend to tell my fortune. But Israel has enchantments, although it says there shall be no enchantments in Israel, and these are our Shabbos, our Torah, our Talmud, these are proper enchantments, for they preserve Israel from danger and death. And Israel—”

“ Enough, enough, thou little Maggid.† Thou wilt be a light in the Captivity, a

* The weekly section of the Torah.

† Preacher.

BY THE STREAM

prince in Israel! Enough! See how beautiful the afternoon! Run out and play in the fresh air."

"That is just what my father told me," and Moses smiled.

"Go now, and don't delay until it is too late," and the rabbi opened the door for him. Soon the boy was running along the road, until he came to the row of willow trees that almost hid the clear, flowing stream, where the boys delighted to fish. It was a picturesque spot, and cool on the hottest day of summer.

With his mind full of the rabbi's utterances, and in fancy anticipating the pleasure of being one of his regular pupils, Moses did not notice the group of boys that were gathering in front of the road, and apparently blocking his advance, until he was made suddenly aware of their presence.

"Jew-boy, Jew-boy!" cried one of the lads, coming closer to him, as if desirous of

having a quarrel. He knew the fellow to be one of the worst boys in town, although he had never played with him. It was Fritz, and standing near were Wilhelm, Luther, and Otto, all tall and strong, and not the quietest of their kind. But then Moses noticed Max and August approaching, who were gentler and better-behaved. He gathered courage at their appearance. He knew they would not allow any unfair encounter.

“Jew-boy, Jew-boy! Don’t you want to fight?” and Fritz advanced threateningly.

“Now, Fritz,” Moses rejoined, clenching his fist, “I fancy I should have a poor show in a fight with you. Don’t you think so?”

Fritz and his comrades could not help laughing at the boy with his clenched fist. He looked so comical in his attitude.

“Let him alone, Fritz. Let him alone,”

BY THE STREAM

Max exclaimed, moving towards Moses as if to protect him.

“One moment, Max,” and Moses stepped forward, and, looking Fritz full in the face, said:

“Don’t call me coward, because you think I am afraid to fight. I am ready to fight. The only thing I am afraid of is that you might break my wrist, and how could I help my father then to earn a living?”

“You are a good fellow, Moses,” Fritz replied, but not before Max and August had whispered certain words to him, which made him change his bearing. “Do you wish to fish with us? Here, take a line.”

All his companions laughed, in spite of themselves, at the change in his tone and attitude, but they said nothing.

“Come, boys,” and Moses dropped down on the bank overlooking the stream, “come, I’ll tell you something, and you can fish afterwards.”

The boys were soon ranged around him on the ground, and waited, full of curiosity, for him to begin. They did not wait very long.

“Fritz, you just now called me a Jew-boy.”

“O Moses, I didn’t mean anything. It was only a joke,” and Fritz looked very uncomfortable, particularly as Max and August were fastening their gaze upon him in a way he did not relish.

“Joke or no joke, Fritz, it didn’t hurt. I am proud of being what you call a Jew-boy. Jew-boys make good men, and help the world to become better, as I wish to do, if I live to be a man.”

Max clasped his hand, and moved still nearer.

“But you Jews killed our Savior,” said Wilhelm. He had been confirmed a week before, and apparently that was the chief fact he had learned on the occasion.

BY THE STREAM

“ You are wrong, Mr. Wilhelm,”—he was the oldest, and hence Moses gave him a man’s title,—“ you are wrong. The Romans killed him. They were the rulers then. The Jews had no power. Besides, to stone to death, not to crucify, was the Jewish method of killing, although very, very rarely practised. At any rate, a Roman was governor, and the Romans, not the Jews, should be blamed.”

“ Didn’t the Jews ask the Romans to put him to death? ” Fritz inquired.

“ I’ll answer you, Fritz, by asking you a question, which you no doubt will be able to answer. Where would your religion be to-day, if your Savior had not been killed, as you believe? ”

The boys were silent.

“ Another point, Mr. Wilhelm. If you think the Jews killed him, why, you ought to thank, not curse, us for having made your religion possible.”

Again they were silent. Moses was putting things in an entirely new light.

“Now, boys,” he continued, “when I am a man, I shall try to study all religions, and shall work to make people respect each other’s beliefs. My father has often repeated to me the words in the Hebrew Bible, ‘Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?’ ”

“That is in spirit just like the words in our Testament,” said Max, after a brief pause,—“‘In my Father’s house are many mansions.’ ”

So the lads talked together on earnest matters. The words of Moses had taken deep root, and would not so soon be forgotten. Then, suddenly, the sun began to sink, and the air grew cooler.

“Boys, it is getting late. We have been talking so much that I really forgot the time. It must be almost night. I am needed at home.”

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He sprang to his feet, and the rest followed his example.

“ Moses, I’ll walk a while with you,” said Max, throwing his arm around the Jew-boy’s shoulder, and when they parted,—they were not silent on the way,—Max had promised to come to supper some Friday night.

Moses was just in time for the evening service, and looked so well after the afternoon walk that Mendel rejoiced in his heart.

III

A FRIDAY NIGHT

It was not many weeks before that Friday night came which had been looked forward to with some impatience. On the return of Moses and his father from the synagogue, they found Max seated by the window anxiously awaiting their appearance. They were not alone. They were accompanied by a tall stranger, a rabbi from Constantinople, who was without friends and funds, and had been invited by Mendel to share the evening meal. It was always the custom in those days, and it is a good old fashion that has by no means died out, to ask home, for the Sabbath repast, any poor stranger met at the synagogue service. This spirit of hospitality is part of the treasures of our religion.

The rabbi was a very handsome man,

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with keen, dark eyes and flowing, black beard. He spoke the purest Hebrew in a voice that was soft and musical. His ancestors had fled from Spain, first to Portugal and then to the Orient, on the final expulsion of the Jews in 1492. A learned scholar, he had lived a rather roving life, preferring to travel whenever possible. He was a diamond polisher by trade, and was now wandering through Germany on his way to Holland, where he hoped to get a position that would enable him to save enough money to provide for further journeys, perhaps to America. He had heard that there were large Jewish congregations in the chief cities beyond the sea. Meanwhile he had much to contend with, and he had taken temporary shelter in Dessau, which was widely known for its friendly character.

After greeting each other warmly, Max and Moses were soon called to supper. It

was a simple repast, wholly different from what Max was accustomed to in his home. Yet it was none the less attractive; the table looked at its best, and the faces of all were lighted up by joy and kindness. First came the blessing of the wine and the two small loaves of bread. The cup was passed around, and the bit of bread was eaten.

“We call that ceremony, that benediction over the wine, Kiddush, or Sanctification, a rather long word, but you understand it,” said Mendel, turning to Max. “We associate our Sabbath, which lasts from sunset to sunset, with the happiest feelings, for it is a joyous festival, our Sabbath bride, as our poets call it.”

“And the two loaves of bread?” Max asked, deeply interested.

“We say the blessing over the two loaves, to remind us of the double portion of manna which the Israelites found in the wilderness on the day before the Sabbath,

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so as to render it unnecessary to labor on the sacred day. Thus our Sabbath doubles our joy," and Mendel smiled contentedly at his family.

"Pardon me, sir," Max inquired once more, with the curiosity of youth, "what does that peculiar lamp signify that is hanging over the table?"

"Why, that is the Sabbath lamp, which we light on Sabbath eve, to tell us that the Sabbath brings brightness. Is it not so?" And he spoke a few Hebrew words to the guest from Turkey, who responded at a rapid rate, to the great amazement of Max. Moses, however, could follow very fairly the meaning, and thus expressed the rabbi's thought:

"Light has many meanings in our holy writings. It may mean life or death, joy or sorrow, religion or knowledge. 'Let there be light,' were the first words spoken by the Almighty to the world before it was created

as a habitation for life. Light means, too, our Torah,—as our sages say, ‘ If you keep my light burning in your soul, I will keep your light.’ ”

“ That is a little sermon, Max,” said Moses, after a pause. “ But I wish I knew why the lamp is seven-branched. At Rabbi Hirsch’s house, there are only two sockets for the oil. Why is that, father? ”

“ I have heard, my son, that the two lights refer to the two terms, ‘ remember ’ and ‘ observe,’ with which the two versions of the Sabbath commandment—Exodus xx. 8, and Deuteronomy v. 12—respectively begin. As to the sevenfold light, that, I admit, is a mystery, as many say can be seen whenever the number seven occurs in Scripture. When you grow older, you will learn more about the number seven. But I fear that the discussion is wearying your young friend. Is it not so, Max? ”

“ Not at all, Herr Mendel. I am very

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much interested in your remarks. There is a similar mystery about the number seven in history. How frequently does it occur! There are the seven sleepers, the seven wise men, the seven-hilled city of Rome, and—”

“ The seven wonders of the world,” added Moses, glad to show that he knew something about history, although, in fact, his knowledge was very limited.

So the talk went on from one topic to another, and after supper came the customary Benshen, or blessing after meals, which Moses repeated to the great admiration of Max. Such fluency he never expected to attain, although he would have to study Hebrew, which was part of the course for clergymen.

“ Herr Mendel,” and Max bent forward eagerly, “ excuse my asking so many questions, but at our house we always say a blessing before meals. Here you say it also

afterwards. Why do you follow such a custom?"

"Well, we do not like to rush away from the table without thanking the Almighty for His goodness. A few minutes' devotion makes a pause for reflection and wise resolution. And in our prayers we bless God as the Creator of the whole universe, who giveth food to all creatures, animals as well as man, Jew as well as non-Jew."

"Pardon me again, Herr Mendel, but I hear often about Jewish narrowness, yet here, in your daily prayers, how could the Jew be broader? It is a shame how ignorant the world is of the real nature of the Jew."

"It is a long, long story—the persistent misunderstanding of the Jew. Perhaps it is partly his own fault, but only partly so. The world not only does not know what he is, but does not want to know, which is worse, for this means that the prejudice

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against him will survive for ages. It is, indeed, a sad state of affairs, but you are too young to worry about it."

"Father," said Moses, with such earnestness that his eyes fairly shone in his excitement, "father, if I live to become a man, I'll try to teach the world what a Jew is, and what our religion is. I'll help to lessen the ignorance, if God spares me."

"God grant your wish, my dear, dear son," his mother exclaimed fervently, resting her hand as if in blessing on his head.

"I'll tell you, friends," Max said earnestly, "what I would like to do when I become a man. I would like to study all languages and all religions, and show how they are related to each other, like children of one family. That is what I would like to do." *

* This wish was fulfilled in the career of one of his descendants, the famous Professor Max Mueller, of Oxford University, a native of Dessau.

“ For one so young, Max,” said Mendel, glancing kindly at the lad, “ your wish does you great credit. I am not a prophet, but if you and Moses, young as you are, have such ideals, such noble ambitions, perhaps the good Father in Heaven will enable you to realize them in the years to come, and thus hand in hand you both will be a blessing to mankind. May God grant it, Amen!”

Max heard these words with much emotion, which he bravely sought to control. His own father could not have spoken with more feeling and affection.

“ Herr Mendel,” he inquired, to change the subject, “ did Moses tell you about Fritz? ”

“ Why, no; what is there to tell? ”

Max then related the incident by the stream, Moses trying in vain from time to time to restrain his words of praise.

“ My son was right, and showed proper judgment. All such prejudice is due to ig-

A FRIDAY NIGHT

norance, and I am glad the boys were taught a lesson. Young people should live together without disputing about religious beliefs. I wish they would show as much good sense when they grow up, and avoid all religious quarrels, which, indeed, end only in bitterness and strife."

"Well, Herr Mendel," said Max, rising after a pause in the conversation, "I am very much obliged to you for your hospitality and your kindly talk. I must go home now before it grows late."

"Good-night, Max. You know you are always welcome. Give my best regards to your dear parents."

"Good-bye, old fellow," Max exclaimed, as Moses went with him to the door. "Good-bye! I have had such a pleasant evening."

"Good-bye, Max. I have also had a pleasant evening, and I hope you will come again soon. Good-night!"

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“The Muellers are a fine family, Moses,” said Mendel, as his son resumed his seat, “and I am glad you and Max are such good friends. It can only benefit you to know so good and clever a lad. Why, he talked as if he were a grown man.”

“Indeed, I hope he will be a good friend when we both are men,” Moses replied.

He did not know that he was to live far apart from his Dessau playmate, and yet have close friends that would help him realize his early dreams.

IV

A WANDERER

“ Moses,” Mendel said one afternoon to his son, a few days after the Friday when the wanderer from Constantinople had been a guest of the household, “ I expect Rabbi Palache to-night. So get through early with what you have to do, and you can come down and listen to our chat. He is a remarkable man, and can tell many things new to you. Now, do not forget.”

His son was not likely to forget. He loved to hear conversation of any kind, but as he had never left Dessau, he saw few strangers and knew nothing of strange lands. The prospect of learning something of foreign countries from the wandering rabbi was particularly pleasing. With the utter absence, in those days, of books of travel for boys and girls, it was left for a

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chance traveller like the poor Turkish rabbi to tell of far-away scenes and experiences.

Moses was just finishing a part of his daily task, making ready for the lesson with his father the next day. It was a stormy evening, and the rain was beating in torrents against the little attic windows which sheltered his study and bedroom, and gave its occupant a glimpse of the sky beyond. The boy's first thought was that the rabbi would not venture out in such weather. But then it occurred to him that an experienced traveller would surely not be kept at home by a little rain and wind. He must have met worse storms when he journeyed unprotected from land to land.

Suddenly he heard the words Shalom Alechem, " Peace be to you," from the floor below. It was his father's greeting to the stranger. The books were quickly thrown aside on a convenient shelf, the lamp put

A WANDERER

out, and Moses, all alert, was soon listening to the conversation between Mendel and his guest. It was wholly in Hebrew, and whenever Mendel thought the conversation was too difficult, he explained a word or phrase to his son, who was then enabled to follow the chat with ease.

“ You say you are from Constantinople? ” It was Mendel who spoke. “ Are there many Jews in that city, Rabbi Palache? ”

“ Where are they not, the children of our people? I have lived in many lands, from Spain to India, from Turkey to China, and the isles of the sea. Where did I not find the children of Israel? It is a miracle, this dispersion of Israel, our Galut.* Like the sand of the sea was to be their number, according to the olden promise to the Patriarch. And like the sand of the sea they are neither to be counted nor destroyed. The

* Captivity.

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waves do not harm the sands, but give them the greater power to resist attack."

"True, true, but you did not answer my question."

"Yes, I was born in Constantinople, and my ancestors came from sunny Spain. I can say, with Jacob, 'Few and evil have been the days of my pilgrimage.' Yet, how wonderful are the ways of Providence! When Constantinople was captured by the Turkish conqueror, Mahomet II, in 1453, a new Turkish empire arose, which was quick to offer shelter to the Jews. As a result, they settled freely in Constantinople and other cities, and were graciously allowed to build synagogues and schools, while their chief rabbi, the learned Moses Kapsali, was held in high favor by the ruler."

"You surprise me. That was in great contrast to the condition of our brethren in Germany," observed Mendel.

A WANDERER

“How so, Rabbi Mendel? Explain yourself,” Rabbi Palache inquired.

“Ceaseless and countless were the persecutions in the fifteenth and following centuries in the land of the Germans. It is hard to imagine the full extent of the sufferings of Israel. Our people were compelled to yield up the third of their fortunes in royal taxes and allowed to engage in only a few occupations. They could not sell their property as they liked, nor could they travel at pleasure.”

“It was different in Turkey. In all those years our brethren could dress in silk and gold, and many became very wealthy. They had some famous teachers, and their lot was happier than in Spain under the shadow of the cross. And when the fires of the Inquisition drove our people in terror, either singly or in groups, from Spain and Portugal to the East, thousands settled in Turkey, where a little Jewish world of its

own was formed. The Marranos, who had practised their religion in secret, here once more became Jews in faith and observance, and by their piety and learning strove to make amends for their apparent desertion from Judaism on Spanish soil. From Turkey many went further to the East, to the far Orient, and strengthened our congregations in Persia, Arabia, and India."

"Tell me, Rabbi Palache," Moses summoned up courage to try his conversational Hebrew, "were there any famous men among our people in those days?"

"Ansche Shem, men of fame, always exist in Israel. There is no era that has not been made glorious by at least one great name. In Turkey the most famous was Don Joseph Nasi, Duke of Naxos, who died at Constantinople in 1579. He had fled to Portugal from Spain, to escape persecution; then he went to Antwerp, and founded a banking firm. Despite their prominence,

the partners resolved to go to Turkey, where they could be Jews openly and without fear. They stopped first at Venice, where Joseph's niece was imprisoned, and her property confiscated. Owing to her uncle's efforts, however, which went as far as an appeal to Turkey, she and her property were released, and in 1553 Joseph followed her to Constantinople. He became a favorite of Sultan Sulaiman and a member of his life-guard. He was made Duke of Naxos and other Greek islands by Selim II. By his wise counsel he aided Turkey in war and peace, and his influence was sought by Spain, Venice, Austria, France, and the Netherlands. On the death of Selim, in 1574, he lost much of his political power."

"Moses," Mendel now interrupted, "let me tell you one interesting fact about Don Joseph Nasi. He wished to establish a Jewish state."

“A Jewish state? Was not Turkey good enough?”

“He had received from Sulaiman and Selim not only the ruins of the once famous city of Tiberias in Palestine, but also seven villages in its vicinity, as a site for a state to be occupied only by Jews. An agent was sent to superintend its rebuilding, and the pasha of Egypt was ordered by Turkey to assist Don Joseph. To hasten the work, Arab settlers in the neighborhood were compelled to render forced labor. Within a year the new and beautiful houses and streets were ready. It was Joseph’s purpose to render his state a rival of Venice as a manufacturing centre. Mulberry trees were planted for raising silk-worms, and looms were introduced for the manufacture of silk. He went so far as to import wool from Spain, to make fine cloth.”

“And was the state really founded?” Moses asked.

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“Despite appeals to the persecuted Jews, especially those in Rome, to emigrate to Tiberias, he seems to have been diverted from his project by other plans. He wished to become king of Cyprus, to develop it, perhaps, into a Jewish state. But that, too, proved an idle dream, like the projects of the false Messiahs who from age to age have arisen in Israel, and have only deluded our people. But, Rabbi Palache, I fear I am talking too much. Let us hear more about yourself.”

“Well, dear Rabbi Mendel, light of Israel in the Captivity, my life has been full of dreams since the hour I started to find the river Sambation, which flows for six days and rests on the Sabbath, and on the banks of which dwell the lost Ten Tribes, patiently awaiting the Messiah’s Shofar blast. I have not found the secret stream, but the current of my life shows no cessation, and my wanderings continue ever. I

am thus a true son of Israel, to whom the statutes of the Lord are like songs in the lands of his pilgrimage, for they fill him with rapture; and even if his pillow is a hard stone by the wayside, his dreams are of heaven and angels." And the rabbi sighed softly.

"Do tell us, Rabbi Palache, about some of the places you have seen."

"If all the trees in the world furnished me with paper, and all the rivers with ink, even then it would be impossible to relate the wondrous story. The words of my days are the words of my seas, for my wanderings have carried me from stream to stream. I was in Spain, and sang the Psalms in the ruins of once illustrious cities, and I wept as I gazed at the débris of once beautiful synagogues. I crossed then to France, where can be found some pious congregations, who love the law, and support the widow and the orphan. Then to Italy,

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where I saw Rome, but I would not pass beneath the Arch of Titus, and I stood for hours in the shadow of the Colosseum, built partly by Jewish slaves. Then to Sicily and Greece, despoiled of all their large congregations. Next I visited the Holy Land, and witnessed how the Samaritans offer burnt offerings on Mount Gerizim—oblations of deceit, as Isaiah calls them. What thoughts were awakened by sunsets in Zion! It seems a place of perpetual sunset."

"The sunrise is yet to be," Mendel interrupted devoutly.

"I touched the Western Wall of Solomon's Temple, saw the stables he had erected, and the sepulchres of the house of David. Syria and Babylonia, Persia and Arabia were in my pilgrimage, and curious were the old synagogues, and tombs close beside them, which came in my path. And in China I was told of an old Jewish colony with a very ancient synagogue in one of the

provinces, which I could not visit, with yellow Jews, while in India I met black Jews, tall and handsome men, who were laborers, but kept the holy days very strictly. But the saddest sight of all—”

“ Well, what was the saddest sight? ”
Moses asked eagerly.

“ It was in Jerusalem. I was walking along the uneven streets that are like the hills that skip in the Psalm, when I was suddenly startled by a fierce cry, and was pushed aside from a narrow path that led upward over irregular stones. ‘ Away, away, thou cursed Jew! ’ my adversary cried, and in fear of my life I fled, and stopped not until I reached the old synagogue. I, a Jew, not to be allowed to tread the Holy City of my fathers! Afterwards I learned the secret. I had entered what the Jewish people call in your language the *trefa Gasse*—the street through which the Christian says his God walked on the way to the cross. They kill

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any Jew found in that pathway, so narrow that you can touch the houses on both sides as you pass. Ah!—so ran my thoughts—they would make the whole world a *trefa Gasse* for Israel, but the Almighty, blessed be He, who formed a path through the waters of the Red Sea, will not forget or forsake His people. Yes, that was the saddest sight in all my wanderings. I cannot forget it and the grief it caused. And now I must return to my lodgings."

"Go in peace," said Mendel, as he saw the rabbi to the door.

V

BETWEEN MINCHAH AND MAARIV

Throughout the week Mendel had little time to devote to his son, apart from his daily lessons, which began before sunrise. There was so much to be done—copying Hebrew books, writing scrolls of the Law, teaching children—that there was rarely an opportunity, save at meals, of conversing with Moses and watching his mental growth.

One day of the week, however, was an exception. It was the Sabbath, and the afternoon of the day, between Minchah and Maariv—the quiet time between the afternoon and the evening prayers—became very precious to Moses. Then he would lie at his father's feet, or sit on a low bench close beside his father's chair, and

listen—O with what eagerness!—to wondrous stories from the olden rabbis who lived and labored, and worked and suffered, in the centuries after the Temple fell, and Jerusalem became a Roman city. Until the day dawned when he could read these tales for himself, he knew no greater pleasure than to hear them from his father's lips in the hush of the Sabbath afternoon, when even the sun was going to rest, and no sound disturbed the stillness of the hour.

Moses was child enough to like all kinds of stories from rabbinical literature; yet he was most fond of tales in which boys were the heroes, not such boys as he met under the willows or in the roadways of Dessau, but boys that were to become great teachers and scholars. Such stories, which have been handed down from age to age, Mendel could not repeat too often. In those days there were no story books or magazines for boys and girls, no free libraries, no

popular reading in cheap form. Hence the passionate fondness of Moses for the Sabbath afternoon hour and his father's tales.

“Father,” said he one Sabbath, as he seated himself this time on his father's knee, “I think to-day I would like to hear about ‘The Inheritance.’”

“Why, Moses, I told you that last week.”

“Never mind. Let me hear it again, father.” And so Mendel began.

THE INHERITANCE

He was growing old and feeble. The end could not be long deferred. So, calling his only son, a lad of hardly fourteen, he said, “My son, I shall not live many days, I fear. You have always been a loving child, and I have tried to be a loving father. You know that I am poor and can leave you no wealth out of my savings. But I have

not wholly neglected you, as you will shortly see."

At his words the boy wept aloud, and assured his father that he would rather have him living, despite their poverty, than acquire wealth by his death.

"Nay, my son," the father rejoined, "obey my instructions. After my death go into the next room, and what you find in a box there, keep for yourself as your precious inheritance."

The man ceased, exhausted, and in a few days he died. The son would not enter the room for some days, to secure the inheritance; his grief was so great. Finally he controlled his feelings, and, going within, he discovered a good-sized box on the floor. Opening it, he saw another box within, and within that still another. At last, after removing a number of boxes, which grew smaller and smaller successively, he came to the last one, which he opened with

great care. Within was neither gold nor silver, only the simple words, "Be kind." And with such care did the boy strive to keep those words in view from day to day that he won the love of all that knew him.

"And now, father," Moses said when the story was ended, "let me hear about Hillel. He was as poor as we are, was he not?" And Mendel was only too glad to tell the story.

THE LOVE OF LEARNING

What was the boy to do? He wished to become a student and enter the academy, but his poverty stood in the way, and he had no friends. But his desire for knowledge had to be satisfied. Some means must be found. He went to work one day, and, reserving half of what he earned for his food, he went to the doorkeeper of the academy,

and offered him the few pennies remaining for the privilege of entering the building and hearing the wisdom of the sages. And how glad he was when day after day he could be an eager listener in the house of learning.

One afternoon he was unable to secure any work, and the doorkeeper refused to admit him without the customary fee. Another might have lost courage. He was undismayed. He glanced upward, noted the high window, and, climbing on the roof by means of a friendly porch, he found he could both hear and see the sages at their discussions in the room below. What happiness was his!

It was bitterly cold as night fell. All through the late afternoon and evening the snow had gradually covered the houses and roads. The morning dawned, the snow ceased. Soon the sages were again assembled, and some complained that the

room seemed dark for so bright and clear a day. Glancing upward at the window above, a kind of sky-light, they saw to their surprise the outline of a human form stretched against the glass. They rushed out of the hall, some of them climbed to the roof, and, hastily clearing away a mass of snow, discovered the poor lad half frozen to death.

It did not take long to carry him down into the house, place him on a warm couch, and restore him to life and strength. He did not need to tell them why he had climbed the roof that cold, snowy afternoon. The sages made every provision for his education and support, and in later years he became the wise, the gentle Hillel, the famous teacher of his people.

“ The famous teacher of his people,” Moses repeated softly, as his father ended.
“ I am sure he forgot all about his troubles

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when he became a great man. Now, father,—”

“ It is getting late, my son. It is almost time for prayers.”

“ Only one story more, please. About the ship and the goods that were thrown overboard! Don’t you remember? ”

“ O you mean ‘ Goods that never Perish.’ ”

“ Yes, yes, that’s the one.”

And Mendel told the tale.

GOODS THAT NEVER PERISH

A ship was on the Mediterranean. It was nearing port, and all the passengers felt in good spirits.

In a corner of the ship a few men began to ask each other’s business. One said he was a goldsmith, and had a box of precious gems in the hold of the vessel. Another dealt in rich silks, cases filled with his goods being a few feet away. A third had a cargo

of fragrant spices from the islands of the East. A fourth had costly raiment, a fifth the finest wool, and so on.

They began to debate as to the relative value of their wares, each claiming his own to be the most precious, and the dispute grew more and more exciting. Finally, a young man, who had taken no part in their conversation, stepped forward and said, "My friends, you all may have valuable goods, but mine are the most precious, for they are imperishable."

They all laughed at his words, and several exclaimed, "Fool, tell us what you are selling. What are your wares?"

"Don't ask," he replied with a smile, "for you cannot weigh them, nor touch them, nor measure them, nor see them."

"He is surely a fool," they thought, and spoke to him no more.

Night approached. The skies changed. A storm arose, so fierce that the captain at

last ordered the ship to be cleared. It was the only chance for the safety of the human beings. The cargo was quickly thrown overboard, crew and passengers joining in the task. What were the feelings of the merchants as, one by one, their precious goods were cast into the sea? Gold, spices, silk, raiment, and wool, all were lost. The storm continued all night, delaying the ship's progress, and finally driving it on shore. The passengers were happily saved, and, after an hour's rest, walked to a neighboring city, where all were hospitably received.

The next day the merchants were strolling through the place, and they came to a large building into which people were thronging. Full of curiosity, they entered, too. A man was preaching. They listened. The voice struck them as familiar. They could not tell his name, nor where they had seen him, but when he had ended, and was

leaving the building, they recognized him. It was the young man who had said his goods were the most valuable.

“Was I not right?” he asked them, as he drew nearer. “Were not my wares the most precious? Gold and silver perish, but the knowledge of the law is imperishable. It cannot be taken away.”

The twilight was deepening. Presently a tiny star would be seen in the evening sky. Hand in hand Mendel and Moses were soon walking in the narrow lane on their way to the synagogue.

VI

AT THE RABBINICAL SCHOOL

It was not many weeks after Max's visit, when Mendel deemed it advisable to have Moses enter the rabbinical school and gain that further knowledge of Jewish law and learning which he felt keenly his own inability to impart. He thought it unjust to his son to keep him longer at home, although he was still young and far from robust.

It was a bitterly cold morning long before sunrise when Moses, wrapped in an old, shabby cloak, which almost hid his face, ran by his father's side over the cobble stones in the roadway to the school-house where Rabbi Hirsch taught the higher branches of rabbinical lore. Mendel walked so rapidly that the boy had to run to keep pace with him. The exercise was

healthful, and when he was presented to the rabbi, his cheeks were glowing.

“I put him in your charge, Rabbi Hirsch. You will find him a studious and obedient pupil.”

“I am perfectly sure of that,” was the rabbi’s rejoinder, as he bade the lad remove his cloak and take a seat with the students in another room, where the lower division had their lessons. He kissed his father, and was soon hard at work with book in hand. It was a chapter from the Torah, with Rashi * and Ramban,† the two famous commentators or interpreters of Holy Writ.

The morning hours fairly flew. He was too busy to notice the time. When the bell struck to announce recess, no one was more surprised than Moses. Now he could go to

* Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, France (1040-1105).

† Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, of Gerona, Spain (1194-about 1270).

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his midday dinner. He put aside his books unwillingly, and hastened home.

“Why, Moses,” his mother exclaimed, when he began to eat hurriedly, “this will never do. You have had nothing since before sunrise. Now you must eat a proper meal. Take your time, my son.”

“But, mother,” he pleaded, “there are still some sentences in Ramban that must be read. I find him much harder than Rashi. I must hurry back, indeed, I must,” and scarcely taking time for the blessing after meals, he ran down the road to school.

The afternoon found him fully occupied. He interested the rabbi by the surprising accuracy of his translation and his intense desire to learn more about the lives and experiences of the sages, whose explanations of the law have become part of Israel’s classics. So the rabbi told him about Rashi and Ramban, the ages in which they lived, and the general character of their works.

“ I like Rashi better, because he is so simple and clear. Yet the other may be more useful to me, because he is harder to understand, and he makes me think.”

The rabbi smiled.

“ My son, I find that your good father has prepared you so well that you can begin the Talmud in the lower class. That will make you think even more.”

The boy was so exultant that the hours were hard to bear until the day's session closed, and he could rush home with the wonderful news. He was to study Talmud! Another step forward. He recalled his father's words spoken in his early childhood: “ Moses, the great thing is to go step by step, as the prophet Isaiah tells us, ‘ Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.’ Then the house is built strongly and well, then knowledge is acquired upon firm foundations. Let ‘ step by step ’ be your motto. The

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words from Isaiah shall be your Posuk, my son."

It was then the pious custom in Israel for a father to give a son a special Posuk, or verse from the Old Testament, or prayer-book, to be a kind of text or guide through life. Hence the pride and joy of Moses at the thought of his advancing "step by step," in the spirit of Isaiah's words. No one could be happier.

"Father," he asked that evening after supper, "what is the Talmud?"

"There are two laws in Israel. One is the law of Holy Writ, and the other the law of the rabbis, which, beginning after the return from the Captivity, under Ezra the Scribe, is the explanation and strengthening of the law of Holy Writ. The Talmud, meaning 'study,' really consists of two parts: first, Mishnah, 'learning,' which contains our traditional rules and principles, arranged by Rabbi Judah the

Prince, about the year 200 of our present era; and, secondly, Gemara, 'supplement,' giving explanations of the Mishnah, which was duly compiled by Rabbi Ashi in Babylonia about three hundred years later. Both together comprise the Talmud.

"But I thought it said in the Torah, 'Thou shalt not add to or take away'?" asked Moses. "Surely the Talmud is an addition to the Law, is it not?"

"Now, my son, you are still too young to understand all this. Be assured, however, of one fact. Our sages of blessed memory saw no other way of preserving the Law than by raising such defences around it—they called them 'hedges'—and they have effectively kept Israel alive to this day. In their love of the Law they submitted to every burden and self-denial. They never looked upon the Talmud as something opposed to the Law, but as its continuation and necessary accompaniment, like body

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and soul. Do you understand? I have tried to make it clear."

"Not quite, father, but I fancy I'll understand the point more clearly when I grow older."

So the days passed. His progress was rapid and sure. He allowed no difficulty to escape him. Every subject had to be made clear. At first he was very much alarmed, because the Talmud seemed to him like a puzzle. Everything was mysterious and strange—language, style, meaning, the connection, the allusions; but step by step he gained the mastery. It did not take many months before he was able to understand the simpler portions, without any help from his teacher. Here Rashi was his only guide, who strove to make the Talmud as clear as he made the Torah.

Imagine his delight and surprise when he came across the outline of some charming story which his father had been telling

him from his early childhood. Now it was about Honi, who never mingled with his neighbors, and fell into a long, long sleep of seventy years, to find on his awakening that he was forgotten, so that he cried at last, “ Give me friends or death ! ” Now it was about King Solomon and his wonderful seal-ring, the loss of which caused him so many painful adventures, so much wandering in beggar’s guise from land to land, until the ring was found, and his kingdom was restored. Now it was of Akiba, a simple, ignorant laborer, whose wife had faith in his powers, and made him devote years to study, until he became a leader in Israel, to die, with the Shemang on his lips, at the rude hands of the Roman soldiery. These tales mingled with others that had been told to him, until he began to wonder more and more at the brilliant thoughts and fancies of those early rabbis, who step by step had laid the foundations of the temple

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of the Talmud, in the study of which Israel felt ever young and strong, and bade defiance to every foe—nay, has outlived all the ages of persecution, according to the olden promise, “No weapon forged against thee shall prosper.”

One morning on entering the school, the rabbi stated that he was about to leave for another position, and a new teacher was to be appointed, whom all would love. And one day, not long afterwards, the new teacher arrived—David Fraenkel, who was also Dessau’s chief rabbi. No choice could have been happier, no teacher more inspiring. From the very first lesson he gave Moses, the boy felt that a new era had dawned, and that his progress was to be made still more certain. Nor was the teacher’s pleasure less keen at sight of the lad, already beginning to show his deformed shoulders, who displayed such remarkable genius for study. Thenceforth

their paths were long to run together, and Moses was to owe to this teacher, more than to any one else, the secret of his intellectual growth.

Mendel was glad that his son was so pleased with the new teacher, who was a man after his own heart.

“What I like, father, about Rabbi Fraenkel,” remarked Moses one night, “is his simplicity. You would never think that he knew so much, if you heard him explain to us boys the most difficult disputes in the Talmud.”

“You will learn, my dear son, as you gain knowledge of the world, that the greater a man, the simpler he is. Of course, I mean a truly great man. Who could have been simpler than Abraham in all the relations of life? A great man need only appear as he is. He need not try to be greater than he is. Modesty, simplicity, courtesy are the marks of greatness after all. You

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cannot learn this too early, my son, and, as for Rabbi Fraenkel, I believe you will gain as much from his love as from the books you study under his guidance."

VII

A TALK WITH RABBI FRAENKEL

The months passed quickly, and spring came with unexpected swiftness. One day Cavalier Street, Dessau's pride, was covered with snow, but the next morning the swallows twittered in the linden trees. It was spring once more, with cloudless skies. The honeysuckle would not be long delayed.

The days being now longer and warmer, there was less hardship at the Mendel home. Moses did not need to wear his shabby cloak, and he enjoyed a more or less hearty breakfast before he went to school. The work, however, was just as exacting as ever, for his studies demanded all his time. That they grew steadily more and more difficult was to be expected, but his clear mind was never discouraged by fresh obstacles. Step by step the path became easier, and,

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despite his youth, he was regarded as one of the brightest and most promising pupils.

Rabbi Fraenkel was quick to recognize the boy's genius, and he took pleasure in arousing still further his love of learning. Now, this teacher was not only a thorough Hebrew and rabbinical scholar,—his published works prove his ability,—but he was well acquainted with modern knowledge. It must be confessed that many rabbis of his time were opposed to any other kind of culture than Hebrew. The latter seemed to them amply sufficient. They frowned upon German and Latin, and the new studies that were so attractive to young minds. They even thought that Judaism would be in grave danger if the gates were opened to general knowledge. That was more than a hundred and fifty years ago.

Happily, Fraenkel was a man of different stamp, and he was resolved that Moses should receive a broad education, without

any peril to his religion. He watched with ever-increasing wonder the lad's brilliant progress, his fearless spirit of inquiry, his remarkable power of reasoning, his dogged perseverance, his untiring industry. What he admired most of all, perhaps, was the keen desire of Moses to learn everything about the subject under discussion. No half-knowledge for him. He wanted to be thorough and accurate. He hated to be ignorant. It was pathetic to witness the look of triumph on his face when he solved a difficult point, and the discussion became clearer.

One midday, as he was about to go home, the rabbi asked him to dinner the Sabbath following. The boy was only too glad of the chance to be with his teacher, and he was promptly on hand at the appointed time. During the meal the rabbi expressed great pleasure at his pupil's interest in his studies.

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“ Rabbi Fraenkel,” was the rejoinder, “ I think that it is partly due to the teacher’s interest in his pupil,” and both laughed.

Dinner over, the rabbi took Moses to his study, and began to tell him about the books which crowded the shelves, reaching to the ceiling on two sides of the room.

“ The Talmud is studied best in the lives and works of the wise men that strove to explain its pages. Every student, for instance, should know the chief facts in Rashi’s career, as well as the leading incidents in the history of the earlier and later commentators. Whatever they say is of value. They were nearer the age when the Talmud was written, and had better means of judging its meaning.”

“ Is that true of our religion in general? Can we not understand it better, if we learn more about the history of Israel’s leaders in all ages? ”

“ Most decidedly, my son. There is no

better way. Every Jewish child should be fairly familiar with the lives of great Israelites, not only in Biblical times but in later ages and to-day. Few realize what a class of men they were, what types of genius in varied lines, scholars, statesmen, scientists, poets, philosophers, translators, who have done their share in helping the world advance. How rarely we teach these facts to the young! I am rejoiced that you show interest in such matters, and have always done so, thanks to your good father's example."

"Which have had more influence, Rabbi, great men or great books?"

"It is not easy to tell. Often the book and the man are so bound together that it is hard to say which has been more influential. There is a book on the middle shelf there"—pointing to a square volume—"which I shall let you take home with you to read at your leisure." And, going to the

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shelf, he took down a heavy book, which, judging from its appearance, must have been frequently read.

“ Moses, this Hebrew work—it was originally written in Arabic—is called the *Moreh*, or ‘Guide of the Perplexed.’ Its author was the Eagle of the Synagogue, no less a man than Moses the son of Maimon, called also Maimonides, or Maimuni, and known, too, as the great Rambam. He—”

“ I know, Rabbi Fraenkel, I know. He was born in Cordova, Spain, in 1135, and lived later with his family in Egypt, to escape persecution.” Here Moses suddenly stopped, as if he felt he had been rather rude in interrupting his teacher, although he had meant no slight.

“ Well, my child, you seem to know who the great man was. He had a remarkable life, and wrote remarkable books. He was a truly eminent scholar. Now, of all his works, his *Moreh*, to my mind, must be

regarded as the most famous, and the one that has aroused most thought.”

“ Was he not court-physician to Saladin, who fought with the Knight Templars and with King Richard of England? ”

“ Certainly, Moses. He was appointed to that office after his fifty-fifth year, and about ten years later he wrote the ‘ Guide of the Perplexed,’ which has been translated into Latin and Hebrew, and will, I am confident, appear one of these days in most of our modern tongues.”

The rabbi then told Moses that it was the aim of Rambam to explain difficulties—which are often more apparent than real—in the Torah, and show that our religion has nothing to fear from criticism, that it was thoroughly in accord with the science and thought of the era in which he lived, and had a claim upon the attention and respect of the world.

“ Surely, that was a noble purpose for a

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writer to have in view. Don't you think so?"

"But did he prove his point?" Moses asked after a slight pause, while he opened the volume and began to read a little here and there, as if he wished to test his ability to understand it.

"You ask a peculiar question for me to answer at once. I would rather have you find the answer for yourself in reading the book," and the rabbi laughed heartily.

"But this you can surely tell me. Was the *Moreh* liked by the people?"

"It gave rise to a very exciting dispute, which lasted after Maimuni's death, and created much bitterness. There were many that praised the book, and others that condemned it. Some called the author a very great man, the glory of his age; others said he was a heretic, that is, one who believes no longer in his religion, and that the *Moreh* should be burnt, so that no one might read

it hereafter. The one party was termed 'Maimunists,' the other 'Anti-Maimunists,' and Israel was for a while divided into two camps, as often happens. The Anti-Maimunists did all in their power to limit the Moreh's influence and show what they considered its hurtful character. Perhaps from their point of view they were right."

"We should have only one point of view—the truth. Was the book true or not true—that was the only question to be considered, not was its influence hurtful or not. Not so, Rabbi?"

"That is right, my son, that is right. Yet, few of us are prophets, to rise above our personal feelings. Few of us see beyond our wall of habits and pet ideas, which we have not the courage to outgrow, but regard after a while as the highest and the only truth. Moses ben Maimon was above his age, that cannot be denied, and such an

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incident is not rare. However, we must bear this in mind—most of us that deem ourselves above our age are not Rambams. We are rather inclined to forget this, I fear. But I am talking too much and too seriously for you to follow. Now go home, Moses, and read the *Moreh* as often as you like. Only don't neglect your meals, as is your habit, I fancy, when there is a book to be read. You know the saying, 'Where there is no meal, there is no Torah.' "

Hugging his precious volume to his heart, Moses was soon on the way home. What happiness was in store for him! What a privilege! To be allowed to read the thoughts of the great Rambam, the glory of his age, the Eagle of the Synagogue! And the moment he reached the house, he began to read its pages with constantly increasing interest.

In later years * he used to say in jest:

* Kayserling's *Moses Mendelssohn*, p. 5.

“ This Maimuni I have to thank for my stunted body; he alone is its cause. But I love him for all that, for the man has sweetened many a sad hour in my life, and hence has repaid me tenfold for what he has done to my bodily frame.”

VIII

SHADOWS AND RESOLVES

For some months now Moses had an inseparable companion—the “Guide of the Perplexed,” a book which might naturally be supposed to interest a much older reader, for it dealt with rather difficult problems connected with Jewish law and thought. Yet he pored over it night and day. It rarely left his hands, save at his meals, or when he was at school, until he had grown familiar with its contents and character.

No wonder it was his delight, for it discussed the very points upon which he desired information, and gave him a ready answer to many of his doubts. Although more than five hundred years had passed since it was written, and there had been such marvellous changes, it was still a trustworthy guide to him in his inquiries. Under

its influence lofty thoughts came to him, as the Jewish religion appeared larger and broader than ever before. It was a world-religion, as the prophets had foretold. And as he recalled how much this religion had endured, how much it had been persecuted, he felt more and more pride in being a Jew, more and more resolved to be its champion. He did not know, perhaps, that, about a hundred years earlier, a young Israelite in Amsterdam, who was to attain the highest rank as a thinker, had drifted away, after reading the work of Maimuni, from his historical religion, under the spell of the *Morreh*. This youth was Benedict Spinoza.

Moses would often discuss Maimuni's views with his father and Rabbi Fraenkel. They were both surprised at his maturity of thought, and urged him to stop reading and studying for a while. He was too young to wrestle with such problems. He should wait a few years. He was forgetting Max

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in his devotion to his books. He should walk out more and breathe the fresh air. He was so far advanced that he would lose nothing if he gave up school for an entire year. But he would not be persuaded, he kept on as before. He simply could not cease reading.

One morning, after a sleepless night, he was too tired to rise, and for weeks he had a violent fever. A second attack followed his return to school before he had fully regained his strength, and now for a month he was forbidden to study. This time the physician was firm. The matter was serious, the boy's life was in danger if he disobeyed. But it was hardly necessary to tell him not to read. He could not, he was too weak to hold a book or sit up in bed. His friends came to his bedside without speaking a word. Max, on his visits, would kiss Moses on the forehead, after leaving fruit and flowers. Rabbi Fraenkel would stay

beside him for a long time, holding his hand until Moses would fall asleep. Sleep was his best medicine. That and good food would restore him in due course.

On his recovery, Moses looked almost as well as ever. The enforced rest had been very healthful. His shoulders, however, curved more than of old, his bodily frame had shrunk from constant stooping over his books and want of exercise. That was to be expected. But out of his eyes there shone such gentleness and intelligence that he charmed all who knew him. Fancy the love which he aroused in his parents, and with what devotion they strove to meet his every wish! On his part, need it be said how he sought to deserve their affection by being always quick to obey them and rendering willingly any service they required?

At school he was as diligent as ever. His clear brain won its way in every study, and difficulties vanished one by one. He was

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mastering the Talmud step by step, and gradually obtaining a wider knowledge of Jewish history and literature. He fancied himself a Christopher Columbus discovering a new world, with each new advance, each step forward.

Then, one day in midsummer, there came a blow, so sudden and unexpected that Moses felt crushed to earth. He could not, he would not believe it, but it was none the less true. The news spread first slowly, then more rapidly, that his beloved teacher, to whom he was attached so tenderly, was to leave Dessau in August, to become chief rabbi of the great city of Berlin with over three hundred Jewish families. Who could blame him, with his abilities, for forsaking Dessau and accepting so magnificent a position?

Moses met the rabbi the afternoon after he had heard the startling news, and he was inconsolable when the report was confirmed

by his own lips. Yes, he had to go. Who could be offended at his departure? He was still young and had ambition. He thought he could do more for Israel in Berlin, with its larger opportunities. That was not to be denied.

“O Rabbi, take me with you,” Moses implored. “What can I do without you?”

“Moses, my son, that is impossible. There are many reasons why I cannot take you with me. You know you could not stand the strain of much further study. You are far from strong, and you must first regain your full strength. Don’t think of a large city like Berlin. Remain here. Take ample exercise. Leave the rest to time. Besides all this, is not your duty with your parents?”

“But, tell me, am I never to see you again?” And the lad wept bitterly.

“I shall always be your friend, Moses, and whenever you need my help, you can

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rest assured it will be given to you freely and gladly. Come, my son, be calm and trust in the Almighty."

The rabbi left Dessau at the appointed time in August. The congregation naturally missed so excellent a man, but to Moses the city seemed in a dark shadow, and he felt weighed down as if he were carrying a heavy burden. Such a sensation was strange to one so young. He did without complaint all that was to be done, but he took no pleasure in his books. He refused to walk out to the willows, despite pressing invitations again and again from Max. Sometimes he would pass the schoolhouse in the early evening and imagine his teacher at the little window, recalling his kindly face and voice. Then he would occasionally gaze longingly at the rabbi's home, but it was closed and no one bade him enter.

Moses was now past thirteen. That was

the age when Jewish boys of that day left school and began to work for their living. This step was absolutely necessary when the parents were poor, as his were. Mendel and his wife discussed the point earnestly; it was rarely absent from their thoughts. They did not wish him to leave school, for they knew how he loved his studies, in which he had made such gratifying progress. Yet their means were limited, and the little help he might secure for himself was not to be despised.

But what could he do? they asked themselves. Could he wander from place to place, with a heavy pack on his shoulders, like most boys of his age? Could he, with his delicate health, peddle goods from house to house, from village to village? He could not enter any other calling without giving up his religion, so unjust were the laws of the state. What was he to do?

They had ardently wished him to become

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a rabbi, but with his teacher's departure that seemed no longer possible. Besides, they knew that Moses lacked physical health, and could not endure many more years of study, even if they had the means of providing more bountifully for his food and clothing, so necessary for his health and comfort.

The parents would not tell their son of their anxiety on his account, but he was not to be deceived.

“Father,” said he, one evening, a few weeks after the rabbi had left Dessau, “father, this cannot go on any longer. Neither you nor I can stand the strain. I have made up my mind. Unless I can study at Berlin, I do not wish to live. Mother,” —as his mother came into the room,—“am I not right?”

“O my darling child, what is your plan? Do you want to become a rabbi? You know you are not strong enough

yet to devote yourself to many years of study. Be sensible, my son. Remain here with us."

"I am trying to be sensible, dear mother. This is my purpose. I shall go to Berlin and study further. Rabbi Fraenkel will help me, he promised me that. If I am to starve, it is better to starve in a large city like Berlin than in a little place like Dessau." And his eyes flashed with excitement.

"My son," spoke his father, gravely, "we shall not oppose your wish further. God will be with you. You have been always our darling child, and He will never forsake you."

When the Holy Days were over—they did not seem joyous Holy Days in the Mendel home—the moment of departure came. He kissed his brother and sister, embraced his parents, who were controlling their feelings bravely, and with his clothing

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and a book or two tied in a bundle he was about to set off on foot to Berlin.

“Here, Moses,” a young girl exclaimed, running up to him, “here is a ducat, which my parents bade me give to you.”

He thanked her gratefully, put the gold piece in his pocket—it was his only bit of money—and, again bidding his dear ones farewell, he began the journey with a light heart. They watched him until he reached the turn in the road, and then he was lost to view.

IX

A NEW WORLD

It was on a morning in October, 1743, when a boy of fourteen years, weak and almost exhausted after a five days' journey on foot, came timidly to the Rosenthaler gate in Berlin. That was the only door through which Jews could enter the Prussian capital, at least a Jew like Moses, the son of Mendel, who, a poor, unknown emigrant, desired to be admitted.

It was the third year of the reign of Frederick the Great, and the condition of the Jews of Berlin, as well as in Prussia in general and throughout Germany, was far from enviable. In fact, although Frederick was a brilliant soldier, and claimed to be a great philosopher, he shared in large measure the prejudices of his age against the Jewish people, and their position under him

grew even less endurable, so constant were the indignities they had to suffer.

We cannot understand, we who live in a country like the United States, where civil and religious liberty is the law of the land, and where there are no unjust distinctions as to race and creed, wealth and poverty,—we cannot begin to realize the state of affairs in Berlin in the eighteenth century. Had the famous king, to whom Prussia owes so much, foreseen that a hundred years after his death the city would be one of the largest Jewish centres in the world, with some of the finest synagogues, hospitals, schools, and homes of benevolence, that among its Jewish residents there would be a novelist like Berthold Auerbach, a statesman like Eduard Lasker, a journalist like August Bernstein, a physician like Traube, a scholar like Zunz, with other eminent names in art, science, music, literature,—if he could have foreseen all this, he might perhaps have

acted in a broader spirit. Not only was the number of Jews limited by law, and the right of residence restricted (1747) to one child of every family, but Frederick decreed later that no Jews should receive new privileges unless they started factories, none were allowed to marry without buying porcelain of royal manufacture, so as to increase the state revenue. Nearly twenty years afterwards, when Moses married, he was obliged to buy twenty China apes, life size, from the royal factory. Some of these ornaments are still preserved by his descendants among their most precious possessions.

The boy stood, timidly at first, before the gate. There was reason for his timidity. He was tired and hungry, he was anxious to gain rest and shelter, and he knew not what treatment he might receive. Suddenly the Jewish official who had supervision over immigrants like him came forward.

“Who are you?”

“I am Moses, the son of Mendel, of Dessau.”

“Why have you come to Berlin?”

“I wish to study.”

At this reply from such a lad the man was fairly amazed. It was entirely unexpected. In the meantime Moses had regained his courage, despite the questions that were addressed to him rather harshly.

“You wish to study?” repeated the official. “You wish to study? Pray, how can you support yourself?”

“I wish to study,” Moses replied, ignoring the last question.

“Answer me at once, boy. What means have you?”

“I wish to study,” was the reply as before.

“Don’t jest with me. How can you support yourself?”

Moses was embarrassed. He knew not

what to say. He had never thought that he would be asked such a question. He reflected a moment, and a happy smile lighted up his colorless face.

“ Rabbi David Fraenkel.”

This was the solution of every difficulty, this the answer to every question. Now he would be safe. Taking compassion at last on the poor lad, who was interesting him more and more, the man sent a messenger to the rabbi’s house. He was fortunately at home, and without loss of time he hastened to the gate and clasped Moses in his arms. Now the boy felt that his sufferings were over. He was soon to find that they were only beginning as he entered a new world.

“ Come, Moses,” the rabbi exclaimed, for he saw at once how exhausted the boy was, “ come, let us go home,” and, holding tightly to the rabbi’s arm, Moses was soon in the busy streets of Berlin, which, in contrast to Dessau, seemed a very large city,

indeed. The tall houses, the handsome shops, the stately churches, the costly statues, the broad squares, the endless throngs of people all rushing hither and thither—this so aroused his wonder that he forgot for a while his troubles and the uncertain future.

“Now, here we are,” and, stopping at a small house in one of the side streets, and opening the heavy oaken door, Rabbi Fraenkel led Moses into the front room.

“First of all you must have something to eat, and then you will rest on the sofa in that corner. After you have slept a bit, we can talk over matters. No, not a single word yet. Not a word. Come to the table. There is a seat for you. The meal will soon be ready. Why, there it comes, sure enough. Now eat.”

He needed no second invitation to the bountiful repast, and never did he repeat with more fervor the customary blessing,

which was an acknowledgment of God's kindness in bringing bread from the earth. Surely, it was He that had led him to this resting-place after his toilsome journey. With difficulty he refrained from shedding tears of happiness as well as sorrow. The thought of his many privations mingled with a sense of joy at the prospect of speedy help. His friend saw that the boy was deeply moved, and he left him for a few moments, to glance at some books in the library adjoining. When he returned, Moses was finishing his meal, and he looked much refreshed.

“Now, a little sleep, my son.”

“But I am not tired, Rabbi.”

“Not a word, not a word. There is the sofa—now a little sleep, ‘a little folding of the hands,’ and your strength will return like an armed man’s,” said the rabbi, changing wittily a verse in the Book of Proverbs. And Moses was soon asleep.

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It was almost night when, entering the room, the rabbi was delighted to observe how Moses, who was now wide-awake, appeared a different lad, although his face still showed traces of the long journey. His eyes were brighter, his hands firmer, his voice stronger than a few hours ago, when he pleaded for admission at the Rosenthaler gate.

“Now, my son, you can tell me something about your journey,” and the rabbi drew him to a seat by the latticed window. “How did you leave your good parents? Were they well?”

“Dear Rabbi, I left them in the best of health, God be praised! As you may imagine, they long refused their consent to my going, but they did not oppose me after they saw how firm I was in my desire.”

“But how did you manage on the journey?”

“Well, a little girl—I think it was Eph-

raim's granddaughter—gave me a ducat when I was about to depart. There is nothing left now. It went for bread and milk each morning, and a bed of straw in the barn at night. The journey took me five days. I was not very extravagant, was I?" And the boy smiled. "It was fine weather all along—that was some comfort. Do you know what gave me the greatest happiness? The thought that step by step I was coming nearer to Berlin and you," and he threw his arms around the rabbi's neck.

"I soon grew used to the journey—it was over a fairly level road. I rested now and then by the wayside under some friendly hedge, a kindly teamster would give me a ride, and my sleep could not have been sounder. The stars appeared like sentinels over my head, and nothing disturbed me. Yet I was glad enough when I caught a glimpse of Berlin in the distance."

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The rabbi was deeply moved by the simple recital. The lad was certainly a brave fellow to have had no fear.

“One thing more. I felt really a son of Israel on the entire journey, for were not our people always wanderers from the time of Abraham? Did you not tell me in Dessau that the word Hebrew really means an emigrant. Did you not?

“Now, Moses,” the rabbi spoke after a pause, “I wish you to sleep here to-night. To-morrow I shall provide you with permanent quarters. You can always have your meals with me on Sabbaths and Holy Days. I shall also have you copy for me—you write Hebrew so beautifully—a work that is ready for the printer, and for which you will receive some groschen weekly. That will help, no doubt. Now, for the present, I shall say nothing else, but I shall not forget you. We have talked enough. Get to sleep, and to-morrow you

STEP BY STEP

can begin your Berlin life in reality. You will be pretty busy, but you can stand it. Good-night, God bless you!"

Did the youth dream that night, like Jacob of old, of a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels thereon ascending and descending? One cannot know, but his slumbers were refreshing, and he awoke full of confidence in the future.

X

WINNING HIS WAY

There is an old saying often used by young men and women as a motto for their college classes: *per aspera ad astra*—through difficulties to the stars, or through obstacles to success. It is a good thought for college lads and lasses to reflect upon, although their difficulties are not so very severe, and are usually limited to text-books, recitations, examinations.

In the case of Moses, however, no motto could have been more expressive, had he known Latin at that time. Surely, he had difficulties on all sides, obstacles which were real and hard to overcome. Would he reach the stars, would he succeed at last?

On his second day in Berlin he felt that he had gained some headway. Thanks to the rabbi, he was certain of a few groschen

weekly. The work of copying Hebrew was not difficult, and always gave him pleasure. Then an attic room, large enough for all purposes, was secured for him at the home of a very pious Israelite, one Hyman Bamberger, who was very fond of Hebrew literature, and eager to befriend deserving students. Here, too, he had the assurance of meals on two week-days. With no expense at all for his room, and his food for three days amply provided for, he was confident that it would be an easy task to live the rest of the week. He would not starve. He would get along step by step.

Now, it must be remembered that he had been accustomed to scanty fare from his early childhood. It was always plain living at his home. Yet he had never known actual hunger or privation. His parents' love had shielded him ever from such suffering. He was soon to realize the full meaning of hunger. There was poverty, of course, in

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his parents' dwelling; but their affection had softened its sting. He was now to feel privation in its sharpest form. Experiences that he had never deemed possible were to fall to his lot, and during his first years in Berlin he was to taste the bread of affliction, as the unleavened bread is termed that we eat on Passover. Yet he never faltered in his determination to win success. He never lost hope or thought of giving up the struggle and returning to Dessau. A lad of less courage would have yielded to circumstances. He was made of sterner stuff than to play the coward. He was to conquer circumstances, as most of us can do if we only will.

There is a story told by a famous Dutch writer about a warrior, who always had difficulty in carrying out his plans. He almost failed at times, and when he did succeed, it was only by the exercise of the greatest effort. Finally he realized that he

had a secret enemy that was trying to defeat him on every occasion, and render useless his most precious plans. He resolved to find out the enemy that was spoiling his life. One evening he went for a walk. He saw a man wearing a mask coming towards him. By some strange feeling, he knew that it was his lifelong enemy. He must kill him, and he exclaimed as they met: "You are my enemy. I shall try to kill you. Draw and defend yourself." The stranger drew his sword, and said: "I am ready, but first see who it is whom you would fight." He removed his mask and, lo, the warrior stood before himself! He was his own foe, as is every boy or girl, man or woman, that yields to timid fears, and becomes a coward in the battle of life, instead of meeting boldly every obstacle and winning success step by step.

If every author or inventor or merchant, or worker in any field, would yield to his

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own fears, and not resolutely labor on, how poor would the world become!

Moses rose early each day—it had been his habit from childhood—and so arranged his studies and Hebrew copying that they should not conflict with each other. His first thought was of the task for Rabbi Fraenkel, as that fortunately yielded him a little money. When each day's allotted work was done, then with ardor he pored over the Talmud, sitting up late every night until his bit of candle was burnt to the end, and he went to bed and slept refreshingly.

Ah, how can we realize into what distress he was plunged when hunger stared him in the face! Often, when he had not a groschen for a more satisfying meal, he would divide his small loaf of bread so that it might last the day. Frequently, too, there would be no dinner at all, yet, undisturbed, he would continue at work. Happily, now and then more copying was to be done,

which gave him the prospect of meals for a week or two ahead.

It was very much to his credit that he never thought of asking help from his richer brethren or even of appealing to Rabbi Fraenkel for further aid, although he would have received the assistance desired. He felt that he had no right to claim anything from others, for he had come to Berlin at his own risk. In this way he preserved his self-respect, which he would have lost, had he asked people for alms. How many precious gems did he possess, even if he was so very poor! First was ambition, then love of learning, then industry, self-respect—gems which outshine gold and diamonds, and form what is called character, our best possession.

Bearing in mind the advice of his teacher, who always urged him to broaden his education, he resolved to perfect himself in German literature, which was a closed door

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to most of the Jews of that day, as many thought it wrong to speak and write the language of the land in which they lived, preferring a homely jargon of their own, a blending of German and Hebrew. By thus adopting in every-day life a dialect of their own, they not only narrowed their thought and ambitions, but strengthened the popular prejudice against them as a foreign race. It also postponed, if it did not make impossible, any movement to secure them justice and equality. That was to come later, after the French Revolution.

It must not be forgotten, however, that a small number of Jews received a more modern training, and were becoming known in other than purely mercantile lines. Moses followed their example and resolved to be a German. He felt that while in religion the Jew was to be separate and distinct, in his social and business life and daily attitude he was not to be exclusive, if he

wished to be at peace with his fellow-men. He owed a duty to his country as well as his creed, and to perform that duty aright to his country and age would not make him less a Jew. This aim Moses ever kept in view despite every adverse circumstance. It was the secret of his later efforts to secure more justice for the Jew from the German states and more consideration for German thought from the Jew. Of course, this was a century and more ago, when conditions were hardly as favorable as now for the spread of kindness and justice.

One day—it was in 1746—while Moses was studying at the Berlin rabbinical school, a poor boy entered the building. He was just fourteen, and from the first interview they became attached to each other. Moses showed him every kindness, going so far as to divide his scanty bread with him. He taught him also how to write and read, and the boy made good progress.

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“Tell me, Moses, you have been very, very kind to me, what can I do for you in return?”

“If you wish to oblige me, I’ll tell you what you can do. Get me a German book.”

The lad was bringing the book next day, thinking how pleased his friend would be, when an official of the charitable society met him on the street.

“What have you there? A German book? Is it possible? What a disgrace for Israel!”

Without further ado, he seized the book, and took the lad to the head of the police, to be expelled from the city as a dangerous person. This was promptly done. In vain Moses sought to have his friend sent back. In vain he tried to interest the rabbi in his behalf. But thanks to his efforts, the boy was received as a pupil in the rabbinical school of Halberstadt. This lad, who admitted his indebtedness to Moses in a letter

which has been published, was the grandfather of the members of the present great banking firm of Bleichroeder, known throughout the world, to which Prussia and Germany have often been under special obligations.

Undismayed at the prospect of a similar fate, if he was seen with a German book in hand, Moses continued his general studies with renewed enthusiasm. By feeble candle-light, he used to read German books, which he obtained secretly, and whatever he could gain from German literature was quickly absorbed. He did not care if the book was hard to read, if only it was German. A volume of stories, a book of simple poems, might have helped him considerably; but he did not hesitate to read a treatise on theology or philosophy, so intense was his love of knowledge.

His zeal and industry were not to go unrewarded. A lad so young and so earnest

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was not to remain unnoticed. His clearness of brain, which shone from his large, expressive eyes, attracted many people, while his goodness of heart won him friends, the best kind of friends, teachers and companions, who helped him on the way step by step. The clouds were clearing at last. His poverty was more easily borne each year; for a little bird was singing more and more joyously in his heart, and its name was Hope!

XI AT A BANKER'S HOME

Berlin attracted a number of young men of ability, who desired a larger field. Without means and friends they sought admission, and had enough self-confidence to believe in good times to come. Among these was a needy Polish Jew, Israel Samoscz by name, who was a poet, a thinker, and a mathematician. He had drifted to the capital in 1742, fancying that in so large a city he stood a better chance of gaining a living than in the obscure village where he was born. Despite his abilities, which were little short of genius, the task was a hard one, and he was often reduced to despair.

Happily, at the very moment when all hope seemed removed from him—this often occurs in life—and he was at a loss how to keep from starvation, he found a

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real friend, rich and kindly, who received him gladly into his house, and gave him bountiful relief, made him, in fact, a cherished guest, and bade him have no more anxiety. There are many such people in this world, who are quick to give of their bounty to others less fortunate, and realize the truth of the old saying, "What I give, I have; what I keep, I lose."

Such a friend was Daniel Itzig, a man of eminence, who stood at the head of the Jewish communities of Prussia, and was in later years to become court-banker to King Frederick William II, a position both honorable and lucrative. He had assisted Frederick the Great in his wars and—a rarity for a Jew in those times—he owned an oil mill and a lead factory. Owing to his great wealth and recognized public spirit, he was one of the few of our brethren in faith to enjoy equal rights with Christian citizens, and in official documents it was or-

dered that he and his family should not be classified as Jews, for Jews were not regarded as citizens of the state. But he was none the less attached to his faith, founded at Berlin a school for poor Jewish children, and had the courage more than once to condemn publicly the cruel laws against the Jews.

Israel Samoscz became an inmate of Itzig's luxurious house in the Burgstrasse, on the site of which, decades later, Itzig's grandson was to build the Berlin Stock Exchange. It was a fairy transformation for the poor student—to sit at ease in a mansion and follow his favorite studies without fear as to each day's meal or lodging.

Moses, who had casually made his acquaintance, gradually found him to be an interesting friend, whom he often visited at the Itzig home. A close intimacy arose between them. They were, in fact, kindred spirits.

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“ Moses,” Israel said one afternoon, while they were seated in the spacious garden, for at that period the larger Berlin residences had ample gardens, with high walls that secured privacy, and they were favorite places of resort for the family and its friends, “ Moses, did you ever read anything by Judah Hallevi? ”

“ I have read some of his poems, of course, for they are in the Siddur,* but not his great work, his Cusari. I wish I could get a copy.”

“ Well, I am writing a Hebrew commentary on the work, and I should be very glad to read it to you. You might, in fact, copy some of it for the printer. You write a clearer hand than I do. Let me read a chapter now.”

Now began inspiring hours for Moses, which revived the memory of his delight when he first read the famous work of

* Prayer-book.

Maimuni. It did not take many days to make him fairly familiar with the work of the Spanish-Hebrew poet, physician, and philosopher. Born at Toledo, about 1085, and dying in Palestine about 1140, he was one of the most striking figures in our mediæval literature, and his writings belong to the glories of the golden age in Spain. Loving his religion and people passionately, he resolved to write a book which should defend Judaism for all time. His *Cusari* was the result, and it has gained him lasting fame, and appears now in several languages.

The work is based upon an interesting legend, which some claim to be historical, that a Jewish king, called Bulan, ruled over the Khazars, a Tartar tribe, in the eighth century. One night he was startled by a sudden vision, which left him in doubt which was the best religion. Next day he summoned before him three sages, a Jew, a

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Christian, and a Mohammedan, and ordered them to discuss the point. He assured them that he was open to their arguments, and would adopt the religion which was made most satisfying to his mind. So the contest began. Each sage put forth his reasons why his religion was the best. It was a well-fought debate, and the king listened attentively. At its close, he informed them that he found the Jewish sage the most convincing, and he chose the Jewish creed, founding a Jewish dynasty that lasted two hundred years.

Now, whether this is a legend or an historical fact, it served Judah Hallevi as the framework of his *Cusari*, and it was well-adapted for the purpose. He wrote his book in Arabic, the language of his cultured age, so that thinkers of the day might be influenced by its views. The book remains of lasting value by reason of its literary quality, no less than by its warm champion-

ship of Judaism. Some authors write with their fist, others with their brain: Judah Hallevi wrote with his heart.

Nothing could have been better for Moses than to become familiar with such a work. It warmed his heart as well as satisfied his intellect. It strengthened his love for his religion and people, and made him realize more clearly than ever before that the history of the Jewish people, whom Hallevi called "the heart of mankind," was continuous—a story in many, many chapters, which was not to reach its end until the era when peace and brotherhood should prevail throughout the world.

One cannot describe with what ardor Moses helped his friend to copy the manuscript for the printer. Most of his spare time he devoted to the purpose, and for quite a while. It is of interest to learn that a fragment of his copy, in his beautiful handwriting, still can be seen at a private

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library in Berlin, where it is carefully treasured and guarded against harm with the care bestowed on the original Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia.

“Come, Moses,” Israel exclaimed one afternoon, “it is too damp to walk out. Let me teach you mathematics. You will learn rapidly.” And soon Moses could understand Euclid with ease from a Hebrew translation in his friend’s possession. Those who study geometry know that the work of Euclid is at the basis of the modern textbook. To study it in Hebrew was easy to Moses, and he absorbed the book with enthusiasm, and mathematics became a favorite pursuit ever after.

Step by step he advanced further in the knowledge of Jewish philosophy, and he wondered more and more at the genius of writers whose thoughts have passed like a lighted torch from age to age and furnished fire to the greatest thinkers, although the

debt is rarely recognized. It is curious what the world owes to the Jew. His Psalms and Prophets are read or studied in church and mosque in every clime, and the broadest views of his best minds go to build up modern systems. This should not make us proud, but grateful, that in this way the Jew is fulfilling his mission.

Moses was wonderfully stimulated by the talks with Israel at the banker's house. He wished to continue his studies further and learn at least Latin, so necessary for reading the philosophers of the Middle Ages. Of course, he was too modest to imagine that he was becoming a great scholar; but he was very desirous of knowing Latin and thus widening his knowledge, because many precious works were written in this language.

Yet how was he to buy the necessary books? Where was the money to come from? How was he to pay a teacher? At

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least he could try to save a little, and when he had a few groschen on hand he could buy one or two books anyway. One morning he passed an old book-store and looked longingly at its window, where a couple of titles attracted him. He lingered a moment, gave a second glance, then ran home to his attic room, took out his savings, returned to the shop, and soon owned two treasures—a Latin grammar and a Latin dictionary, both old and well-worn, but treasures priceless to him. The next step was to get a teacher. How was this to be done? He knew no one, and had no money anyway for lessons, which were necessary at the beginning. He was not discouraged at the fresh obstacle. Had he not overcome other difficulties, even more threatening than this? A little patience, a little hopefulness, and all would be well.

These thoughts flashed through him as he hugged his new treasures and sped along

the street homewards. It was a rainy morning, but for him the sun was shining, radiant, glorious sunshine. No wonder his face was smiling, amid the darkening rainfall, perhaps the only face that was bright and happy in the gloomy weather. He knew that there would be no funds for a regular dinner for two days, but that was no more a hardship, and was easily borne. He was used to such a trifle as going without a hot dinner. He was thinking of better things than chicken soup and apple sauce. Already in fancy he was reading the great writers of Rome, already listening to the poets and orators of classic Italy, after which the gates of the early Middle Ages would be open to him, and he would explore its treasures of thought at ease.

XII

MORE LIGHT

It was not long before Moses found a teacher who was of great service to him in the study of Latin. He was a young physician from the city of Prague, where can still be seen an old Gothic synagogue dating from the twelfth or thirteenth century—Dr. Abraham Kisch, another one of the kind-hearted men whom he had attracted by his love of learning, and whose help was of such importance to his growth.

No mere chance led the youth step by step to the attainment of his wishes, and secured for him from time to time excellent teachers at critical periods in his career. If it is only chance that rules our actions and controls our will, Moses would not have survived his early struggles with his delicate health and the obstacles that blocked

his path. It was not chance that guided him from darkness to light, but God's providence.

Every day, for half an hour, Dr. Kisch taught Moses. The lesson was long enough to enable him to learn by himself. In six months he could be his own teacher, and he required no one to prepare him for his reading of Latin. His industry and determination conquered every difficulty. Dr. Kisch found it a distinct pleasure to have such a pupil.

One day Moses, whose keen eyes observed everything, saw a book marked Cicero on his teacher's shelf.

"Dr. Kisch," he pleaded, "do let me see if I can read Cicero."

"I think it is too hard for you, Moses, but you can try, if you like," and he handed the book to the youth.

Moses tried at once to read a chance page, and soon, to the doctor's amazement,

he translated into German, with remarkable ease and rapidity, a page from Cicero's work on Friendship. He rendered it with such feeling, too, that his teacher could not withhold warm praise. Next, he strove to master some of Cicero's orations, but he was hardly interested enough in Roman politics to continue their perusal. They grew wearisome, and he put aside the book.

A few weeks later, on beginning his lesson, he showed Dr. Kisch a Latin book he had just bought. It was a Latin edition of an English philosopher's celebrated work—John Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding." This he read with constantly increasing interest, showing his strong leanings even then toward philosophical study, a field in which he was to win such distinction in after years.

One of his friends in his mature manhood, Nicolai, relates how Locke's work fascinated Moses. With indescribable ef-

fort he labored to decipher it. He sought out in the dictionary every word he did not understand—and he was ignorant of most of them—and wrote them down, until he had two paragraphs completed. Then he reflected on their meaning, and strove to get at the understanding of each sentence by quick thought. When he felt that it was all clear, he compared it again, as far as his knowledge of the language went, with the literal meaning.*

With such readiness was he now able to understand famous authors that he soon studied Plato and Aristotle in Latin translation, and grew familiar with these leaders of Greek thought. And was he now satisfied? First German, then mathematics, then Latin. Was there more to be learned? What other languages was he to master? Moses was never content with half-knowledge. He wished to be familiar with the

* Kayserling, p. 13.

sources of learning in other lands and tongues. Knowing that Latin was at the basis of modern languages, he resolved to study French and English. Here, again, after waiting a while, a teacher was provided, a man of splendid abilities, a brilliant young scholar and writer, to whom Moses was to acknowledge publicly his gratitude.

Only a short time before, when the young king of Prussia, in 1745, flushed with victory, entered Berlin in triumph after the Peace of Dresden, the Jews, among the rest, were quick to join in the public rejoicings. A solemn service was arranged by Chief Rabbi Fraenkel, who preached a patriotic sermon and wrote a special ode in Hebrew, which was sung to the accompaniment of music. The community desired this poem to be translated into German, so that the Christian citizens might appreciate this proof of loyalty, and

a gifted translator was found in the person of Aaron Solomon, afterwards called Dr. Gumpertz, then in his twenty-second year. This man became the teacher of Moses, and no wonder that Moses afterwards confessed his deep sense of obligation to him, not only in the study of French and English, but for his inspiration in many ways.

The earliest letter which we have of Moses Mendelssohn is written to Gumpertz. Its opening sentence reads as follows: "Who is closely acquainted with you, dearest friend, and knows how to value your talents, he lacks no illustration to show how easily fortunate spirits can soar aloft without model and example, develop their invaluable gifts, improve heart and intellect, and rise to the rank of the greatest of men." *

No details are preserved of these lessons in French and English, but it requires little

* Kayserling, p. 19.

effort to imagine the scene—the earnest, brilliant teacher and the eager, industrious pupil. Like Samoscz and Kisch, Gumpertz showed him how to study languages, guided him to the best authors, and then left him to his own labors, without further help, which may hamper instead of assisting. That is the proper ideal of teaching. It simply points the way and prepares the student to help himself. Gumpertz lived long enough to find out that his teaching had not been in vain. Not all teachers are so fortunate.

But he did more than merely teach him grammar and literature. At a certain age we learn from our acquaintances more than from books. In friendly conversation and thoughtful debate, our minds are aroused and strengthened, our tastes improved, our sympathies and interests widened. So it was with Moses, and Dr. Gumpertz recognized what was needed.

“ Moses,” he said one day, “ you are too much by yourself. You are older now, and need more friends. Come with me,” and he took him to a Conditorei, where a number of young men were drinking coffee and eating cake, talking quietly at the same time about their studies. They belonged to the Joachimthal Gymnasium, a well-known high school in Berlin. It was an enlivening scene—the long rows of tables, the students in earnest debate; and soon Moses was chatting with them after the doctor had introduced him to several. He made some of them his friends for life. There were future scholars in that group, whose friendship meant everything for Mendelssohn’s growth and activity. The visit to the Conditorei was an event in his career.

A few years later, Moses owed to Gumpertz an introduction to a man with whose name his own will always be associated. He was a bit older then than when he was

taking French and English lessons. One happy morning in 1754—he was never to forget it—he was led to a little narrow house and up two flights of creaking stairs, into a very small room, where stood a young poet of about his own age. It was Gott-hold Ephraim Lessing, then a poor strug-gling writer, but to form, with Goethe and Schiller, the three-leaved clover of German literary leaders.

“Here, Lessing!” Gumpertz exclaimed, leading Moses to the centre of the apart-ment. “Here is a good chess-player for you.” The acquaintance thus begun con-tinued through life, and their close friend-ship has been immortalized in the charac-ter of Nathan, in Lessing’s “Nathan the Wise,” a work that has been translated into many languages, and has proved a blessing in each, as it has taught the brother-hood of man and the unity and fellowship of religions.

The central figure in Lessing's play is Nathan. It was a startling novelty to present a Jew in literature who was less than a fiend or a rogue. Marlowe's "Jew of Malta" and Shakespeare's "Shylock" were typical of the stage Jew. Lessing showed that the Jew could be a man and a brother, broad, kindly, generous, and his religion was entitled to reverence as one of the great historical creeds. The play abounds in eloquent sentences, which have passed into the literature of mankind as among the most cherished and helpful thoughts. Contact with Moses, appreciation of his genius and ways, led Lessing to paint his friend's portrait in his famous drama, which is a drama of religious liberty and human brotherhood. Such a purpose would arouse little comment now, for the world is familiar with thoughts of the kind. But to write such a work a century and more ago in Prussia was an achievement

that arrays Lessing among the few really great men and women that have stood ahead of their age. And that book was brought about by the chance introduction of Moses to Lessing as a chess-player by Dr. Gumpertz.

But that was in 1754. The turning-point in Mendelssohn's career had occurred a few years earlier. The first meeting with the poet, it is true, was full of significance. It was to be followed by marked development on both sides. Think what this meant in that era—a Jew and a Christian to be joined in close friendship and literary aims when the law of the land was imprisoning the Jew in a Ghetto and embittering his daily life by harsh restrictions on his liberty and livelihood. Each was to learn from the other, and the world was to be the gainer from both.

Yet the real turning-point in his Berlin life came a few years earlier. The hour

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which he had patiently, devoutly awaited, and for whose demands he was fully prepared was no longer to be delayed. He did not know it was so near, but he was ready for the call. He had waited and labored so long. Did he not deserve a reward at last?

XIII VICTORY!

For seven years now Moses had lived and labored in Berlin. It had been a period of great suffering, of intense struggle, of severe privations, of ceaseless industry, of patient devotion to study. But it had not all been shadow. The friendship of the rabbi, the help which his different teachers had furnished, the kindness received in many quarters, these formed the bright side of the picture. Then, too, he felt that he had advanced step by step, despite difficulties that would have discouraged anybody of less grit and ambition. The fact that he saw progress, that light was really breaking on his path, that he was gaining headway after all, was undeniable and made him endure every hardship in the firm hope of final victory.

Moses was no impossible lad. He had his faults and weaknesses. But his good qualities were too many to be impaired by his defects, and he was achieving success by deserving success. Karl Emil Franzos, the Galician novelist, wrote once that "every country has the Jews it deserves." With equal truth it can be said that every boy has the success he deserves.

Naturally Moses was becoming more and more widely known. This slenderly-built youth, with an unmistakable hump-back, and large shining eyes, attracted old and young. His story was known to all in the capital, and the brave fight he was making was winning him friends. It read like a romance—the record of his life from childhood, his years of study at Dessau, his struggles and labors in Berlin. Such incidents were not rare, but he was young to have endured so much. A mere boy, weak, delicate, unused to such trials, with limited

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education, to attain a mastery of languages in a few years and to have overcome every obstacle,—why, it was like some old-time fairy tale of heroes that fought dragons. Why, was not he just as much a hero as a warrior who slew a fire-breathing monster, or a soldier who caught the enemy's spears in his embrace?

Seven years had passed since he had pleaded for admission at the Rosenthaler gate. It was in 1750, when one Sabbath, while dining at Rabbi Fraenkel's—he still retained that habit—the rabbi said after alluding to other matters:

“ Moses, I was asked about you yesterday.”

“ Indeed?” he rejoined inquiringly, half in surprise, half in jest.

“ Yes, and by no less a person than Isaac Bernhard.”

At the name, Moses grew more interested. Mr. Bernhard was a wealthy man—

facturer, and he was held in high esteem. What did he want of me? ran his thoughts. Perhaps to copy some Hebrew book. It would be a little help, indeed, which he would welcome.

“Mr. Bernhard wishes to have a teacher for his children, to live at his house, of course. He spoke of you, and asked me if you would be willing to come. I told him that I could not say, but would let you decide for yourself. He will keep the position open until he sees you.”

The youth’s heart almost ceased to beat in his glad surprise. Such an offer, from such a source, meant new life and activity. It was a long-wished-for dream becoming realized.

“What do you think about it, Rabbi Fraenkel?”

“I do not think at all about it. It is for you to accept it at once.”

“I shall call at the Bernhard house to-

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morrow." He spoke quietly and unconcernedly, controlling his joy as much as he could, although it sparkled in his eyes. Then he added: "How can I thank you, dear friend!"

"Well, my brave son, I knew you would succeed," and he clasped the youth's hand tightly. "I knew you would succeed. I fancy your struggles are over. You will never need any more to divide a loaf of bread into three parts for your day's meals. You have won the victory. I congratulate you."

"God has won the victory for me," was the modest reply. "He has led me step by step, and He will guide me further even in my years of triumph, if these are to come to me. Will He not?"

"Indeed, He will," and Rabbi Fraenkel changed the subject, for he, too, was deeply moved by the youth's tone and words.

Moses saw Mr. Bernhard the following

day, and made so favorable an impression upon him that he was engaged at once on terms that made him almost dizzy. He felt a man of wealth, and could now send something to his parents out of his abundance. And what was just as important, he was to have ample time as well for study and writing.

“Perhaps, Moses,” Mr. Bernhard exclaimed as the interview was ending, “you have done such good work in helping yourself to an education, that I may ask you some day to help me in my business,” and he smiled as Moses left with a grateful heart.

Did Moses prove a capable teacher? The children thought so, four boys and girls from six to thirteen, who had never fancied lessons could be made so interesting, and who formed a loving group around Moses each day, and made rapid advance in their studies, to Mr. Bernhard’s delight.

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“ Rabbi Fraenkel,” he said one day when he met the rabbi on the street, “ Moses is the best teacher we ever had in the house. Why, the children are learning something at last.”

“ Mr. Bernhard, I can tell you the reason why Moses is so good a teacher for the young. He has the brain of a man and the heart of a child.” And they parted after a vigorous handshake.

The children liked best of all a certain hour each week in which he told them of the different religions of mankind, how each had good qualities, and could point to good men and women among its followers.

“ When I speak of the goodness in the different religions, children, it is just as it is with flowers. You find fragrant, beautiful flowers in every country and not in our own only. Even in Switzerland, the land of lofty, snow-capped mountains, you can find a delicate flower close to an icy precipice—

the Edelweiss it is called. That might be made to tell us that there is no religion so cold and harsh but that it possesses some good quality."

"Now about our own religion," he said on another occasion to the children. "Our religion regards other faiths as doing God's work, and their adherents as sharing in future happiness if their lives are good. Hence we Israelites never seek to convert other people to our belief. If they hold firmly and honestly to their own and act accordingly, they can be good and useful men and women, and are as acceptable to the Almighty. The Jew does not wish to interfere with the religion of others, and when he thinks of the future world, he has no idea that all nations will become Jews, but that all mankind will live together in peace and unity, even as our Father in Heaven is One. What could be purer and better than this simple Jewish belief! That

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is the real crown of our priesthood—to hold a belief like that, never mind if the world has not yet advanced far enough to see Judaism as it really is. It will do so, one of these days. And though the time seems long deferred, we must still wait for its coming.”

“ But, Herr Moses,” the eldest daughter once exclaimed—she was a girl of thirteen, thoughtful for her years—“ it is unjust that we should be treated badly. Only the other day they called us names on the street.”

“ That is an old story, Miriam. That need not worry us. I was called once Jew-boy in Dessau when I was a little fellow.” And he told the children the incident under the willows by the stream. They listened full of interest, and loved their teacher more, if that was possible, from that hour.

“ You see, children, it did me no harm to be called by that name. Fritz was

ashamed afterwards that he had acted so rudely. If I had fought him, I should have been whipped, because I was so small, but I taught him what he needed to know. So Israel. We cannot fight with the nations that persecute us, because we are too weak. We have no army, no navy, no cannon. But we can teach the world the lesson it needs to know, as some of us are doing. And one day the lesson will be thoroughly learned and never forgotten."

"But is it not rather hard on us, Herr Moses?" inquired David, a clever boy of eleven.

"No, no; not so hard as you think. It makes us stronger. Don't you know that persecution is often our best friend? It fills us with greater love for our religion, and thus keeps us firmer together, those of us who survive. That is how the Almighty causes good to come from evil. We need have no fear. It is all for the best. That

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is enough for to-day, children," and the hour's talk was over.

But those boys and girls often thought of such hours of teaching, and kept in memory for many, many years afterwards their teacher's wise and earnest words, which helped so much to make them wise and earnest men and women, full of love for their religion.

Had not Moses gained his victory?

XIV

HIS LIFE-WORK

What more is to be said?

The victory was won, after a long contest, in which the result might have been foreseen from the start. Yet there were more battles to be gained, more work to be accomplished, more knowledge to be acquired by this youth of twenty-one.

Yet step by step his further career was rounded out with the harvest of the years.

Tutor to Mr. Bernhard's children first, he became, five years later, his efficient bookkeeper, then his representative, and at last his partner. Book followed book; he did not abandon literature as he grew familiar with his ledger and letter-files. He studied Greek to read Plato in the original. He wrote essays that were admired by cultured German thought, and critical reviews that have become part of German

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literature for their style as well as matter. In 1762 he married Fromet Gugenheim of Hamburg, and he won a prize, offered by the Berlin Academy of Sciences, over the great philosopher Kant. In 1763 he gained from the Government the privileges of a "protected Jew," and was exempted by the Jewish community from paying Jewish taxes, to show their appreciation of his services. In 1767 he wrote his *Phaedon*, to prove the immortality of the soul, and was thenceforth called the German Socrates. What more could he do? Might he not withdraw now from work and enjoy some leisure?

There was more to be done, perhaps the most important work of his life. Sure of the esteem of the German world, he sought to prepare his brethren in faith for German culture by aiding in translating the Bible into German. His translation of the Pentateuch, begun first for his own children,

marked the opening of a new era for the Jews of German-speaking lands, while he strove as well to improve their religious life and adjust to a certain degree their habits and thoughts to the new age that was dawning upon Europe and the world in general.

But how can one tell in a few paragraphs the life-work of Moses of Dessau, as he modestly called himself? And how can one as briefly describe the universal sorrow, among Jews and non-Jews, the rich and the poor, when he died in his fifty-seventh year, on January 4, 1786, a few years after his beloved Lessing had passed away? Prince and peasant joined in lamentation, and many Christians followed the funeral to the grave in the old cemetery at Berlin, where Moses now rests next to his beloved teacher, David Fraenkel.

To-day, if you go to Dessau—it is only a short distance by rail from Leipsic or

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Berlin—you will find the town not so very much changed from the Dessau of Mendelssohn's boyhood. The little houses wear practically the same appearance, although naturally the streets are improved and the willows by the stream have given way to factories. Still there is much that will interest you.

First there is the statue erected in Mendelssohn's honor by the city of Dessau. What would Fritz and Wilhelm and the rest have said, if it had been told to them in their boyhood that the Jew-boy would be honored thus after his death? Then you will glance at the house where he was born, with its inscription, and enter, full of reverence, the simple room where his cradle stood, around which his father and mother gathered, full of hope and ambition for their smiling babe. The dwelling has been turned into a Moses Mendelssohn Home by representative Jews of Germany, where

the memorial of the man is piously kept for future generations.

The hundredth (1829) and one hundred and fiftieth (1879) anniversaries of his birth—the latter was also the hundredth anniversary of the appearance of Lessing's “Nathan the Wise”—were widely celebrated. Large sums were given to found fellowships for poor and needy students, and to organize literary societies in his name. He never went to any other university than his attic room; but on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his birth one of his great-grandsons gave a scholarship fund of one hundred and fifty thousand mark in his memory to the University of Berlin, open to all students without distinction of belief. A full edition of his works has been issued, and the “Council of German Hebrew Congregations” published a “Lessing-Mendelssohn Memorial Book” in 1879.

Dessau saw the most memorable celebration of that one hundred and fiftieth anniversary. The entire court was present, Duke, Duchess, and their retinue, the ministry, members of the State Council, magistrates and clergymen, while, at the special invitation of the mayor, there were deputations present from Berlin, Vienna, Leipsic, Hamburg, and other cities, who honored themselves in honoring the memory of Moses of Dessau.

Although the grave of Mozart is unknown, his matchless music has survived as his enduring monument. Great men need no memorial, say our rabbis; they themselves are their best monuments. So in the case of Moses Mendelssohn. To-day you can visit his grave and the house of his birth, with the many associations that keep his name in constant remembrance. Yet, when all these have passed away, his memory will survive. Such a motto as "step by

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step " will ever inspire youth to noble deeds, and the saying will be repeated for ages: " From Moses to Moses, and from Moses to Moses "—that is, from Moses, the son of Amram, to Moses, the son of Maimon, and from Moses, the son of Maimon, to Moses, the son of Mendel.

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